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SUBJECT: GSE ASKS FOR USG ROLE IN EF NEGOTIATIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with PFDJ Political Advisor Yemane Ghebreab on June 6, 2006, Ambassador was told that the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) continues to move ahead with planning for preparatory talks on June 13 with the Eastern Front and Government of National Unity (GNU). Ghebreab explained that he has not received as much input from the parties as expected, but believes most issues should be resolved during the discussions next week. He noted that the parties had decided not to invite observers for the preparatory talks but he was confident there would be a role for international partners once the formal negotiations got underway. However, he said he would nonetheless welcome USG assistance and advice on how to structure both the talks and an agreement for eastern Sudan, suggesting possible meetings with USG experts in advance of the start of the negotiations. "Fresh" ideas on how to achieve a lasting agreement, especially in light of the problems affecting the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), would be helpful, he said. End Summary.

12. (C) On June 6, 2006, Ambassador met with PFDJ Political Advisor Yemane Ghebreab to discuss recent developments on the Eastern Front and GNU negotiations. Ghebreab explained that the GSE would be ready for the June 13 preparatory talks, but was frustrated that the GSE had yet to receive agenda items from the parties or even the names of the representatives for the GNU. That said, he believes that both parties are committed to the process and to sorting out the outstanding issues for the launch of negotiations during the preparatory session.

13. (C) When asked about whether observers would be present for the preparatory talks, he explained that both parties had agreed that observers would not/not be present at those sessions. The preparatory talks would instead be used to resolve between the parties their differing views on observers for the formal negotiations themselves. Yemane noted that the GNU has been resistant to the idea of observers and the Eastern Front would like to invite most of the international community. He stated that the GSE has no preference other than to find a compromise that

both sides can live with and it will work with the parties to reach some agreement. He added that the GSE would need technical advice from the international community, especially from those governments who have been involved in Naivasha and Abuja. Ghebreab also admitted that the GSE will need the assistance of countries who have leverage with the GNU and can put pressure on them if need be, and made it clear that the U.S. would be an instrumental partner.

14. (C) Ghebreab continued by noting he had little doubt that there would be a role for international actors during the formal negotiations, and more or less assumed the U.S. would be asked to play a role once the parties reached agreement at the pre-talks. Surprisingly, he queried if it would be possible for a USG expert on Sudan to come to Asmara either before or, perhaps better, after the preparatory talks to meet with him and the GSE team and discuss what an agreement in the East should look like. He wanted to draw on our prior experience with Khartoum and would welcome, he said, our input into what a realistic and achievable agreement that could meet both political imperatives and the needs of the people in the east might look like. In particular, he asked us for assistance in coming up with "fresh" ideas in how we should approach such an agreement, looking beyond the CPA. Ghebreab discussed as well other areas where our help could be important as the eastern negotiations move forward and seemed eager to work with us.

15. (C) Comment: The meeting with Ghebreab on Sudan signaled a considerable step for the GSE in terms of asking directly for the USG to provide technical assistance and policy input on the negotiations and agreement. We know that Norwegian colleagues who have also been providing input to the Eritreans have urged them to reach out to the USG but even they were surprised that Ghebreab, who they considered previously to be skeptical about doing so, had been so forthcoming. They suggested that this decision might reflect a policy shift agreed upon at the highest levels in the GSE. Whatever the reasons, we believe that the GSE request gives us a unique opportunity to influence the course of developments in eastern Sudan and also to engage the GSE more directly on support for the Darfur peace agreement as well - especially important given the recent arrival here of both the SLM and JEM non-signatories to the agreement. While no decisions on observers or timing for negotiations have been set, post would like Department's input at the earliest on the possibility of providing technical assistance to the GSE, guidance on engaging the parties prior to negotiations and the role, if any, of observers.
End Comment.

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